

# **Copper Thunderbird: The Art & Life of Norval Morrisseau**

## **Symposium Schedule**

**February 6<sup>th</sup> 2015**

**1:00 – 4:15 PM**

**Student Commons Area FNUniv Regina Campus**

Our symposium will focus on Morrisseau's life, artwork and career from the varied perspectives of our panelists who - as collectors, curators, authors, academics, and/or artists - cover a wide spectrum of experience pertaining to Norval Morrisseau's work. Our panelists: Barry Ace, Tom Hill, Dr. Carmen Robertson, Armand Ruffo, and Jessica Wilson each bring unique insight and perspective to Morrisseau's development and contribution to Canadian Aboriginal art history. In bringing this group of individuals together, the hope is to suggest the need for a holistic vantage point when reviewing Norval Morrisseau's work and legacy in the context of Aboriginal art history.

**1:00 – 1:15 PM**

**“Knowing Norval Morrisseau through Collecting”**

**Jessica Wilson**

Jessica Wilson, Curator at Westerkirk Works of Art will discuss ways that they have approached collecting Norval Morrisseau's work in order to better understand his artistic practice.

**Jessica Wilson** is Curator and Collections Manager at Westerkirk Works of Art. She holds a Masters in Archives and Records Management from the University of Toronto, and a Bachelor of Arts in Art History and Criticism from the University of Western Ontario. She has experience working in artist run centres, museums and art galleries in both Canada and the UK. She sits on the boards of Scarborough Arts and Kawartha Lakes Culture and Heritage Network.

**1:30 – 2:15 PM**

**“Norval Morrisseau: The Early Years 1958-1970”**

**Tom Hill**

This presentation will explore the early years of Norval Morrisseau, the renowned Ojibwe artist, including what motivated him to create the pictographic style almost exclusively his alone from 1958 to 1965. By the late sixties, he was joined by other artists. For the first time, Morrisseau portrayed Ojibwe legends in his art. By doing so he created a unique art form of signs and symbols.

**Thomas Hill** is a Konadaha Seneca from the Six Nations Reserve. In 1967, he received his AOCA from the Ontario College of Art and continued his studies on a scholarship with the

National Gallery of Canada and Carleton University. After fifteen years with the federal government, Mr. Hill accepted the position of Museum Director at the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, where he remained until his retirement in 2004. His work as a curator has done much to raise awareness of the contemporary art practices of First Nations artists, and his publications include the book *Creation's Journey: Native American Identity and Belief*, published by the Smithsonian Institution, and the award-winning catalogue *It Takes Time*, for the Woodland Cultural Centre. He has served as a member of the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery of Canada, a Member of the National First Nations Advisory Committee to the Canada Council, Board Member to the Ontario Film Development Corporation, Co-chair for the National Task Force on Museums and First Peoples, Board member for the Ontario Museums Association, and on the Ontario Arts Council. He has also served as a Board member for the Centre for Indigenous Theatre, and the Kaha:wi Dance Theatre. He is currently a member of the board of the Canada Council, a member of the Canadian Curatorial Committee of the Art Gallery of Ontario, and a board member for Chiefswood Museum.

### **2:15 – 3:00 PM**

*“Norval Morrisseau: Man Changing Into Thunderbird”*

**Armand Ruffo**

In his presentation Armand Garnet Ruffo revisits the writing of his creative biography *Norval Morrisseau: Man Changing Into Thunderbird*. He considers the challenges of writing about the life and art of Norval Morrisseau, and why he found it necessary to break from the realistic tradition of writing in Canada and draw upon the mythic tradition of Indigenous peoples. Using examples from his text, Ruffo illustrates what he set out to do, and how he went about doing it.

**Armand Garnet Ruffo's** work is strongly influenced by his Ojibway heritage. His first poetry collection, *Opening in the Sky*, was published in 1994 (Theytus Books). His work has also appeared in such anthologies as *Looking at the Words of Our People* (Theytus Books), *Voices of The First Nations* (McGraw Hill Ryerson), and *Native Literature in Canada* (Oxford University Press) as well as numerous literary journals including *Dandelion*, *CVII*, and *Absinthe*.

### **3:00 – 3:30 PM**

*"Norval Morrisseau and Androgyny: The Story of a Gift"*

**Dr. Carmen Robertson**

Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau, also known as Copper Thunderbird, created works depicting traditional stories, the cultural and political tensions between Indigenous and European traditions, his existential struggles, and his deep spirituality and mysticism. Robertson places Morrisseau's 1983 painting *Androgyny* into context by analyzing the art work, and Morrisseau's gift-giving gesture. When Canada's Prime Minister assembled his cabinet ministers for a historic photograph in 2008, the six-meter-long canvas served as the backdrop. Because of its powerful

presence and national press coverage, it unwittingly sanctioned the Conservative party's political platform. The vibrant painting was drawn into a narrative that Morrisseau never imagined when he gave it as a gift to the people of Canada. This presentation analyzes how the meaning of the work has traveled since its production as it traces the many efforts to claim it.

Associate Professor **Carmen Robertson** teaches contemporary Indigenous art history and cultures of display at University of Regina. Her research focuses on Indigenous arts, colonialism, representation and media framings. Her SSHRC-supported research project into the work and life of Norval Morrisseau has led to a monograph accepted for publication by University of Manitoba Press. The book focuses on Morrisseau's complicated history with Canada's media since 1962. She has also published essays related to Morrisseau's work in the *Review of Canadian Art*, the *Journal of Canadian Art History*, edited collections, and in a forthcoming e-book geared to students of art history. Born and raised in Saskatchewan, of Lakota-Scottish-Métis ancestry, Carmen's greatest accomplishment is her two beautiful daughters who have now left the nest, much to her dismay.

**3:30 – 4:15 PM**

“Anishinaabeg Cultural Continuity - Art and Advocacy of Norval Morrisseau.”

**Barry Ace**

Norval Morrisseau was a strong Anishinaabeg cultural advocate whose perseverance and tenacity in his quest for traditional knowledge and cultural development opportunities was unwavering. Morrisseau's passion for knowledge and intellectual debate is clearly evident in his early correspondence that is now housed in major public art and government institutions, publications and personal memory which document his advocacy efforts with museum researcher, author and artist Selwyn Dewdney; senior government official Senator Alistair Grosart, and Toronto art dealer and artist Jack Pollock. This paper will present a précis of Morrisseau's early requests for research about North American and South American tribes; his contributions to Anishinaabeg cultural revitalization; and community-based economic development opportunities for the cultural arts.

**Barry Ace** – Anishinaabe (Odawa), is a practicing visual artist and writer currently residing in Ottawa. He is a band member of M'Chigeeng First Nation, Manitoulin Island, Ontario, Canada. His mixed media paintings and assemblage textile works explore various aspects of cultural continuity and the confluence of the historical and contemporary. He is a former Lecturer with the Department of Indigenous Studies at the University of Sudbury and former Chief and Chief Curator of the Aboriginal Arts Program, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada and has written and published extensively on contemporary Aboriginal Art. Most recently he contributed an essay for the Westerkirk Works of Art publication *Copper Thunderbird: The Art of Norval Morrisseau* entitled *Norval Morrisseau: Artist as Shaman*, and for the MacKenzie Art Gallery's *7: Professional Native, Indian Artists Inc.* entitled *Reactive Intermediates: Aboriginal Art, Politics and Resonance of the 1960s and 1970s*.

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